Course: COLL ###
Term: Spring 2015
Room: Building ###
Class: Tuesday, 7:00-7:50

ZOMBIES: THE RISING POPULARITY OF THE UNDEAD IN POPULAR CULTURE

INSTRUCTOR CONTACT INFORMATION

Instructor: Kiara Aguirre
Email: kaa3@rice.edu
Office Hours: by appointment

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Students will analyze portrayals of the living dead in American popular culture through an exploration of the zombie in film and television, and investigate the human fascination with zombies. We will study the history and development of zombies in popular culture, infer what makes television programs such as *The Walking Dead* so successful, and discuss the potential social, political, and psychological reflections of American society represented in such dystopian media. The course includes analysis and discussion of potential survival strategies as proposed by several movies and TV shows. Knowledge of *The Walking Dead* is not required. Spoiler Alert for several movies.

COURSE OBJECTIVES AND LEARNING OUTCOMES

1. Understand the abundance of apocalyptic media that is present in American popular culture as of the last 20 years.
2. Understand the history and development behind the concept of the zombie.
3. Analyze potential cognitive, social, cultural, and political factors and implications behind American fascination with the living dead and related supernatural beings.
4. Apply the knowledge acquired from the course and review of the media to hypothetical dystopian scenarios and measure the viability of these approaches.
5. Apply acquired knowledge in discourse on human fears and patterns in apocalyptic media.

REQUIRED TEXTS AND MATERIALS

All texts and materials for the course will be posted on Owlspace or distributed during class.

ASSIGNMENTS AND STUDENT EVALUATION

Assignments are due at midnight before the day classes meet. Upload the assignment to the Dropbox on OwlSpace and label the file with your name. Late assignments are addressed on a case-by-case basis. A series of late assignments may result in a subtraction of points from the assignment.

Participation (20%)
Most classes will have a discussion or activity component. Attendance allows for participation credit along with submission of a number of class assignments.

Homework (20%)
Homework will be assigned after each class and will be posted on Owlspace that evening. Students must answer the prompt and submit a reflective response and incorporating course material or outside sources if desired.
Scavenger Hunt (10%) due Week of February 2nd
Find an article, a piece of academic literature, blog post, or any similar media that addresses one of the learning outcomes for this course and that you believe adds to the knowledge of the group. Write a summary and reflection about the piece, and submit the link or file along with your 1-page assignment to the Dropbox.
Creative Writing Assignment (20%) due Week of March 16th
There are a variety of interpretations about what a post-apocalyptic world looks like. Write a 2-page story of your own addressing the key ideas present in the majority of zombie movies, shows, and games: how do you get food? What is the distribution of labor in your group (Or if you are alone survivor, how do you allocate your time during the day?)? How is leadership within the group established?
Final Assignment (30%) due Week of April 20th
Students will be tasked with completing a 2-page analysis and reflection of the knowledge they acquired in the course answering the following question: "Why are humans so fascinated by the living dead, in particular, zombies?" Students must mention the cognitive, social, and political factors they believe play a role in this fascination with zombies, and incorporate them into the analysis.

GRADE POLICIES

This course will be graded on a satisfactory/unsatisfactory basis. Students will need a 70% or above to pass the class.

ABSENCE POLICIES

Students are expected to notify the instructor of scheduled absence and to ask the instructor or peers about the material covered in class.

RICE HONOR CODE

In this course, all students will be held to the standards of the Rice Honor Code: http://honor.rice.edu/honor-system-handbook/. This handbook outlines the University's expectations for the integrity of your academic work, the procedures for resolving alleged violations of those expectations, and the rights and responsibilities of students and faculty members throughout the process. Although group work and collaboration is allowed, please contribute your own work and thoughts to the course in order to enrich the discussion and the course experience.

DISABILITY SUPPORT SERVICES

If you have a documented disability or other condition that may affect academic performance, or if you need accommodations, please: 1) make sure this documentation is on file with Disability Support Services (Allen Center, Room 111 / adarice@rice.edu / x5841) to determine the accommodations you need; and 2) notify me to discuss your accommodation needs.

SYLLABUS CHANGE POLICY

This syllabus is only a guide for the course and is subject to change with advanced notice.

COURSE SCHEDULE

Week of January 12, 2015
Introduction to Zombies
- History and Definitions
  - *Read: http://www.diamondbackonline.com/diversions/article_4b1ffefa-313f-11e3-9fac-001a4bcf6878.html*
  - *Read:* http://www.diamondbackonline.com/diversions/article_19474570-74af-11e2-968d-001a4bcf6878.html

Week of January 19, 2015
A Review of Media Representations of the Zombies in Film, Television, and Video Games
- The Walking Dead, film in the last 20 years, Apps, Events

Week of January 26, 2015
Instances of International and Nation-wide Zombie Interest
- Courses at other universities, UCI MOOC, The Zombie Research Society, Zombie Runs

Read: http://news.uci.edu/press-releases/amc-instructure-and-uci-to-offer-multidisciplinary-mooc-based-on-the-walking-dead/

Week of February 2, 2015 (Scavenger Hunt Due)
A Review of the Academic Literature on Zombies

Week of February 9, 2015
Tropes of the Post-Apocalyptic Scenario and Dystopian Media (including recent NYT Best-sellers and Box Office Hits)

Week of February 16, 2015
Cross-Cultural Exploration of the Undead
- Vampires, werewolves, all that buzz
- *Read*: http://io9.com/5070243/war-and-social-upheaval-cause-spikes-in-zombie-movie-production

Week of February 23, 2015
What makes *The Walking Dead* so successful?
- *Read:* http://www.rollingstone.com/movies/news/the-rise-of-the-walking-dead-20131031
- *Read:* http://variety.com/2014/tv/news/how-the-walking-dead-breaks-every-rule-we-know-about-tv-hits-1201089433/
- Key moments in *The Walking Dead*

Week of March 2, 2015
NO CLASS (SPRING BREAK!)

Week of March 9, 2015
Cognitive, Social, Culture, and Political Analysis (Why Are We So Obsessed with Zombies?!)
- *Read:* http://www.nydailynews.com/news/national/zombies-hey-normal-college-professor-article-1.1284892
- *Read:* http://online.wsj.com/news/articles/SB10001424127887323611604578398952000653448
- *Guest Speaker: Dr. Sandra Parsons*

Week of March 16, 2015
Recap of last class and an Exploration of Human Fear
- "Why are we so obsessed with zombies?! " Continued
- What are humans so afraid of, and why are they so afraid of it?

Week of March 23, 2015 (Creative Writing Assignment Due)
Religious and Moral
- What do religions say? What do religious texts mean by the resurrection of the dead?
- Does the abundance of zombie media (in particular) imply moral anxiety?

Week of March 30, 2015
NO CLASS (MIDTERM RECESS)

Week of April 6, 2015
What would happen in the case of an apocalypse (whether it be by zombies or not)?
- A public health, military, social, and psychological view (Maslow's hierarchy of needs)
- In-class activity (scenarios and discussion)
- Fun link: http://www.cdc.gov/phpr/zombies.htm

Week of April 13, 2015
TBD: Students will suggest and vote on a topic of their choice that has not yet been covered in class.

Week of April 20, 2015 (Final Assignment Due)
What did we learn?

*Note: There will be no violent media presented during class without prior notice. Some topics may be strong, and students will be given prior notice. Themes are currently listed in the syllabus.